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ABSTRACT

Teachers may fail with junior high school age and black students because these groups differ from their senior high school age and white counterparts in their perceptions of which teacher behaviors are important. To test this hypothesis, black and white ninth and twelfth graders were asked to select their three best and three worst teachers and state what they considered to be the most important behavior differences between each good and each bad teacher. The 8640 identified behaviors were categorized according to three general dimensions: warmth, organization, and stimulation. Blacks and ninth graders more frequently perceived warmth factors as important, while for whites and twelfth graders organization and stimulation factors were more important. The 20 specific behaviors most frequently perceived as important were identified. Eighteen of these differed significantly by race or grade level. However, in terms of rank order listings, four of the top five behaviors for each group (ninth grade whites, ninth grade blacks, twelfth grade whites, twelfth grade blacks) were identical: (1) ability or willingness to adequately explain material; (2) ability to present material interestingly; (3) willingess to help students with work; (4) caring attitude. (Author/MC)

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A COMPARISON OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS BY BLACK AND WHITE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by Robert W. Sizemore

Few educators would deny that the efforts of teachers to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning are at times unsuccessful. The results of this failure to develop positive and harmonious relationships with students are evidenced in decreased academic achievement, increased behavioral problems, and a high degree of emotional stress for administrators, teachers, and students. Secondary school teachers often acknowledge a particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining pleasant classroom environments for junior high school age students. Many teachers contend that these problems are magnified in interracial junior high school classrooms. A study was conducted in an eastern Virginia city school system which operates under a federal court ordered busing plan to investigate the possibility that teachers may fail in their efforts to work with junior high school age and black students because these groups perceive as important different teacher behaviors and characteristics from their senior high school age and white counterparts.

The study was undertaken on the assumption that impressions of others are formed in terms of characteristics the perceiver feels are important. Brown (1964) defined this perceptual discrimination as one's ability to sort out individuals according to some important criterion, noting general differences between persons along certain dimensions characteristic

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of the perceiver. These characteristics are considered important because they relate to attitudes, needs, or problems of the perceiver. It was hypothesized that because students have different needs, teacher behaviors which are perceived as important by some students will be perceived as unimportant by others. Therefore, the behavior of students and their ability or willingness to profit from different instructional techniques will be based on the perception of the relavence of teacher behaviors and instructional techniques to their needs. Thus, many of the problems in schools may be traced to the little effort apparently being made to bring together teachers who demonstrate specific behaviors and instructional techniques with students who consider those behaviors and techniques important.

A randomly selected sample of 480 secondary students was administered a modified version of the Personnel Decision Analysis developed by Alan Brown. The sample consisted of an equal number of black and white ninth graders, and black and white twelfth graders who were selected from each school in the city. The research instrument required students to select their three best and three worst teachers during the past two years. The students were asked to state what they considered to be the most important difference between each good and bad teacher. Each student identified 18 differentiating characteristics or behaviors of teachers which were perceived as important. Because the test is projective in nature and student responses were limited only by their own

imagination and vocabulary, the data revealed a valid indication of students' perceptions of teachers.

The 8,640 identified behaviors were then categorized according to the three general dimensions of teacher behaviors identified by Ryans (1960) as warmth, organization, and stimulation. Warmth behaviors included such factors as the teacher being nice, friendly, caring, and fair. Organization behaviors included such factors as the teacher's preparation and organization, and the teacher's ability to explain the material and control the class. Stimulation behaviors included such factors as the teacher's ability to vary instructional techniques, have an interesting class, and be stimulating and enthusiastic.

Analysis of variance of student responses indicated highly significant differences by race and grade level. Blacks and ninth graders more frequently perceived warmth factors as important ($p<.001$, $p<.001$), whereas whites and twelfth graders more frequently perceived organization factors ($p<.016$, $p<.001$) and stimulation factors ($p<.001$, $p<.001$) as important. No perceptual differences were found to exist between male and female students. The mean group scores and variance analysis for warmth, organization, and stimulation are presented in Tables 1-6.

The 20 specific behaviors most frequently perceived as important by students were also identified. Chi square analysis revealed that of these 20 specific behaviors, 18 differed significantly by race or grade level. These 20 specific bipolar behaviors are listed in Table 7.

Table 1

Mean scores on warmth by race, grade level, and sex

Group	Mean	Standard Dev.	Standard Error	N[a]
9th Grade Blacks	10.416	3.765	0.344	120
9th Grade Whites	8.033	4.044	0.369	120
12th Grade Blacks	7.566	3.590	0.328	120
12th Grade Whites	6.125	3.458	0.316	120
9th Grade Boys	9.470	4.174	0.383	119
9th Grade Girls	8.983	3.983	0.362	121
12th Grade Boys	6.824	3.742	0.335	125
12th Grade Girls	6.869	3.435	0.320	115
Black Boys	9.258	3.866	0.353	120
Black Girls	8.725	4.008	0.366	120
White Boys	7.008	4.162	0.374	124
White Girls	7.155	3.557	0.330	116

[a] Number of subjects in sample population.

Table 2

Variance analysis of teacher warmth

Source of Variation	F Value	Significance Level
Main Effects	27.148	.001*
Race	31.883	.001*
Grade Level	49.369	.001*
Sex	0.555	0.457
Two-way Interaction	0.731	0.534
Race-Grade Level	1.833	0.176
Race-Sex	0.262	0.609
Sex-Grade Level	0.149	0.700

*Surpasses significance at the .05 level

Table 3

Mean scores on organization by race, grade level and sex

Group	Mean	Standard Dev.	Standard Error	N[a]
9th Grade Blacks	5.016	3.210	0.293	120
9th Grade Whites	6.233	3.514	0.321	120
12th Grade Blacks	6.675	3.197	0.292	120
12th Grade Whites	6.933	3.625	0.331	120
9th Grade Boys	5.302	3.519	0.323	119
9th Grade Girls	5.942	3.290	0.299	121
12th Grade Boys	6.592	3.481	0.311	125
12th Grade Girls	7.034	3.338	0.311	115
Black Boys	5.491	3.117	0.285	120
Black Girls	6.200	3.456	0.315	120
White Boys	6.419	3.885	0.349	124
White Girls	6.758	3.229	0.300	116

[a]Number of subjects in sample population

Table 4

Variance analysis of teacher organization

Source of Variation	F Value	Significance Level
Main Effects	7.880	.001*
Race	5.881	.016*
Grade Level	15.007	.001*
Sex	3.231	.073
Two-way Interaction	0.726	.537
Race-Grade Level	2.063	.152
Race-Sex	0.120	.729
Sex-Grade Level	0.027	.870

*Surpasses significance at the .05 level

Table 5

Mean scores on stimulation by race, grade level and sex

Group	Mean	Standard Dev.	Standard Error	N[a]
9th Grade Blacks	2.566	2.304	0.210	120
9th Grade Whites	3.733	3.105	0.283	120
12th Grade Blacks	3.758	2.747	0.251	120
12th Grade Whites	4.941	3.298	0.301	120
9th Grade Boys	3.226	3.013	0.276	119
9th Grade Girls	3.074	2.563	0.233	121
12th Grade Boys	4.584	3.363	0.301	125
12th Grade Girls	4.095	2.747	0.256	115
Black Boys	3.250	2.723	0.249	120
Black Girls	3.075	2.477	0.226	120
White Boys	4.572	3.603	0.324	124
White Girls	4.086	2.827	0.262	116

[a]Number of subjects in sample population

Table 6

Variance analysis of teacher stimulation

Source of Variation	F Value	Significance Level
Main Effects	13.886	.001*
Race	19.585	.001*
Grade Level	20.338	.001*
Sex	1.293	.256
Two-way Interaction	.053	.984
Race-Grade Level	.004	.948
Race-Sex	.064	.800
Sex-Grade Level	.093	.760

*Surpasses significance at the .05 level

Table 7

Specific teacher behaviors identified by students

Behaviors	9th Gr. Whites	9th Gr. Blacks	12th Gr. Whites	12th Gr. Blacks	Totals
1. Explains material/does not explain material (o)	191	132	182	182	687*
2. Nice/mean (w)	98	164	32	64	358***
3. Interesting/ boring (s)	87	41	129	100	357***
4. Helps students with work/ (o)	78	62	98	101	339**
5. Cares/ (w)	64	62	75	86	287**
6. Goes too fast/ (s)	50	34	77	81	242**
7. Makes sure students understand/ (o)	52	31	56	85	224**
8. Tries to teach/)o)	61	32	60	43	196*
9. Controls class/ (o)	42	28	84	41	195***
10. Understanding/ (w)	51	37	43	39	170
11. Uses different instructional techniques/(s)	20	8	87	40	155***
12. Fair (in grades and tests)/ (w)	38	9	47	53	147**
13. Helpful (in general)/ (w)	29	44	23	48	144*
14. Yells/ (w)	51	40	20	19	130**
15. Listens to students/ (w)	27	31	29	40	127
16. Mad, has bad temper/ (w)	53	35	21	13	122***
17. Gives too much work/ (s)	27	54	15	20	116***

Table 7 continued

Behaviors	9th Gr. Whites	9th Gr. Blacks	12th Gr. Whites	12th Gr. Blacks	Totals
18. Racially prejudiced/ (w)	21	38	18	16	93**
19. Is not at school, late/(o)	15	12	39	27	93**
20. Talks too much/ (s)	16	36	11	29	92*

(w) Warmth, (o) Organization, (s) Stimulation
*Race Difference **Grade Level Difference ***Race and Grade Level Difference at 05% level of significance.
Vergule indicates bipolar behaviors.

A particularly interesting finding was that the perception of racial prejudice in teachers differed according to the grade level of students, but not the race of students. Black and white ninth graders were more sensitive to and conscious of racial prejudice in teachers than were either black or white twelfth graders. It should be added that it is indicative of the school system's successful efforts in promoting racial harmony and understanding that only 93 out of 8,640 responses pertained to racial prejudice at all.

The 20 behaviors and characteristics most frequently perceived as important by students were based on the total frequency of responses made for a designated behavior. Each student made 18 responses, thus a behavior might be mentioned many times by relatively few students and be included in the top 20 list. For this reason each of the 20 most frequently mentioned behaviors was examined to determine the number of different students in each group who mentioned it at least once. This information is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Specific teacher behaviors identified by different students

Behaviors	9th Gr. Whites	9th Gr. Blacks	12th Gr. Whites	12th Gr. Blacks	Totals
1. Explains/	67	48	60	64	239
2. Helps with work/	37	34	32	39	142
3. Interesting/	30	18	48	34	130***
4. Nice/	39	51	10	20	120***
5. Cares/	27	27	34	31	119
6. Listens to students/	23	22	21	24	90
7. Understanding/	17	22	24	26	89
8. Controls class/	18	10	33	25	86**
9. Fair/	16	9	30	30	85**
10. Goes too fast/	19	12	33	21	85***
11. Makes sure students understand/	22	18	22	20	82
12. Uses different teaching methods/	12	5	37	25	79***
13. Tries to teach/	19	14	24	19	76
14. Yells/	25	24	11	10	70**
15. Helpful/	16	16	14	18	64
16. Mad, temper/	22	18	12	6	58**
17. Not in room/	8	11	21	25	55**
18. Talks too much/	9	26	4	11	50***
19. Prejudiced/	13	14	13	12	52
20. Too much work/	7	17	4	11	39*

*Race Difference **Grade Level Difference ***Race and Grade Level Difference at .05 level of significance.

Vergule indicates bipolar behaviors.

The Spearman rank order coefficient between the top 20 behaviors according to the number of times mentioned, and the same 20 behaviors according to the number of different students who mentioned them was +.8751 ($p<.001$). Thus it is apparent that the total number of times a behavior was perceived as important was a reflection of its importance for the population of students who were sampled.

Of the 20 specific behaviors, a majority differed significantly by grade level or race on both lists. Yet when analyzed in terms of rank order listings for the four groups, four of the top five behaviors for each group were identical. Thus the most revealing (and encouraging) finding of the study may not have been the identification of differences among groups, but the identification of a few fundamental, critically significant teacher behaviors perceived as important by all secondary groups. The behaviors thus identified were (1) the teacher's ability or willingness to adequately explain the material, (2) the ability of teachers to present the material in an interesting way, (3) the teacher's willingness "to help students with the work" after it has beeen presented, and (4) the teacher's caring attitude.

The rank order listings for the four groups are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9

Rank order listings for twelfth graders

Twelfth Grade Whites		Twelfth Grade Blacks	
1. Explains/	182	1. Explains/	182
2. Interesting/	129	2. Helps with work/	101
3. Helps with work/	98	3. Interesting/	100
4. Varies instructional methods/	87	4. Cares/	86
5. Controls class/	84	5. Makes sure students understand/	85
6. Goes too fast/	77	6. Goes too fast/	81
7. Cares/	75	7. Nice/	64
8. Tries to teach/	60	8. Fair/	53
9. Makes sure students understand/	56	9. Helpful/	48
10. Fair/	47	10. Tries to teach/	43
11. Understanding/	43	10. Controls class/	41
12. Not in room/	39	12. Varies instructional methods/	40
13. Nice/	32	13. Listens to students/	40
14. Listens to students/	29	14. Understanding/	39
15. Helpful/	23	15. Talks too much/	29
16. Mad, temper/	21	16. Not in room/	27
17. Yells/	20	17. Too much work/	20
18. Prejudiced/	18	18. Yells/	19
19. Too much work/	15	19. Prejudiced/	16
20. Talks too much/	11	20. Mad, temper/	13

Table 10

Rank order listings for ninth graders

Ninth Grade Whites		Ninth Grade Blacks	
1. Explains/	191	1. Nice/	164
2. Nice/	98	2. Explains/	132
3. Interesting/	87	3. Cares/	62
4. Helps with work/	78	4. Helps with work/	62
5. Cares/	64	5. Gives too much work/	54
6. Tries to teach/	61	6. Helpful/	44
7. Mad, temper/	53	7. Interesting/	41
8. Makes sure students understand/	52	8. Yells/	40
9. Yells/	51	9. Prejudiced/	38
10. Understanding/	51	10. Understanding/	37
11. Goes too fast/	50	11. Talks too much/	36
12. Controls class/	42	12. Mad, temper/	35
13. Fair (grades)/	38	13. Goes too fast/	34
14. Helpful/	29	14. Tries to teach/	32
15. Listens to students/	27	15. Listens to students/	31
16. Gives too much work/	27	16. Makes sure students understand/	31
17. Prejudiced/	21	17. Controls class/	28
18. Uses different teaching methods/	20	18. Doesn't stay in room, is absent too much/	12
19. Talks too much/	16	19. Fair (in grades)/	9
20. Doesn't stay in room, is absent too much/	15	20. Varies instructional methods/	8

Many teachers in the school district were asked to name the behaviors or characteristics which they felt students would perceive as important. It is revealing that no teacher mentioned any of the four behaviors which were shown to be important for all secondary student groups. Thus teachers in the school district apparently are unaware of the behaviors which their students perceive to characterize a good teacher.

Secondary students in the school system used in this study clearly differed in their perceptions of teacher characteristics according to race and grade level. What do these differences mean? What do they reveal about the students who hold these perceptions and the teachers whose behaviors were perceived as important?

Each student is particularly sensitive to certain characteristics of teachers. Brown (1977) described these important characteristics as constructs--"personal, bipolar abstractions, used to structure a person's world."(p.20) Blacks and whites, and ninth and twelfth graders in the school system surveyed are apparently structuring their worlds according to different abstractions. Blacks and ninth graders apparently have a greater need for warm, understanding and friendly behavior because they are to a greater extent structuring their worlds according to these dimensions.

Teachers are to a significant degree perceived as bad if they are weak in the construct behaviors through which groups of students structure their world for meaning and need satisfaction, and are perceived as good if they are strong in the constructs

through which meaning and need satisfaction are derived. These perceptions may have no relationship to the fact that a student is actually learning anything in a particular teacher's class, but they have a positive relationship to the creation of teacher-student interpersonal harmony and the establishment of a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. Behavior is affected by perception. (Combs and Snygg, 1959) Obviously, if students who have a strong need for warmth or stimulation do not perceive it in their teachers, their behavior will refelct tension or boredom to the extent that no one's needs, including those of the teacher, will be met.

The procedure used in this study has much practical value to administrators and teachers. The most important use would simply be in making teachers aware of behaviors or characteristics which their students perceive as important. Systemwide and school staff development programs could include the recognition of teacher behaviors considered important by some or all student groups, and practical assistance to teachers in developing skills in these aspects of their relationships with students.

The identification of perceptual differences in student groups could be helpful to personnel administrators in placing applicants with particular strengths in particular schools. For example, the decision to employ an applicant for a position at a junior high school or a predominantly black school could be made with personal warmth factors in mind.

Principals could use data generated by local school samples in assigning teachers to particular classes, and in identifying

strengths or weaknesses of their staffs as perceived by their students. Because teacher behaviors are identified, but teacher names need not be revealed in this procedure, a principal could share with his staff the information gained from schoolwide or classroom samples in a non-threatening manner.

It is hoped that teachers and students can change as they become aware of students' perceptions. Teachers can adjust their behaviors and instructional methods to accomodate student needs. Students can become more conscious of instructionally related teacher skills and less concerned with personality variables as an awareness of their perceptions develops maturity in their expectations of teachers. Yet neither teachers nor students can be expected to become what they are not. Both groups will continue to see thing through lens colored by their experiences, attitudes and needs. It is the inescapable task of school administrators to develop instructional programs and train instructional staff members with an awareness and acceptance of perceptual differences as important factors in decision-making.

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